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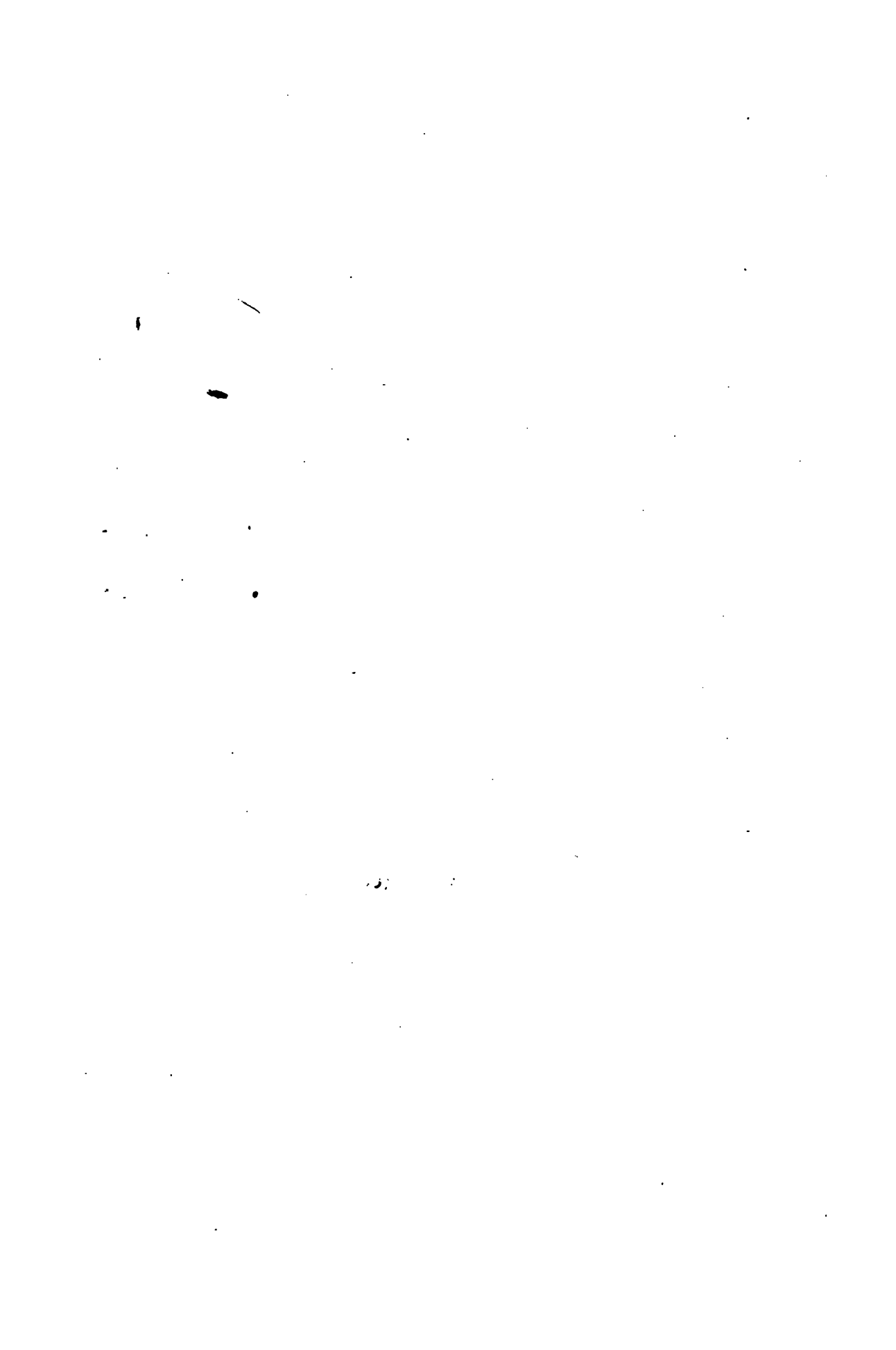
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FROM THE

SUBSCRIPTION FUND

BEGUN IN 1858

30 Nov. 1900



Open Access

In Public Libraries

Exposed

Being a reply to Mr. H. Keatley Moore's paper in THE LIBRARY

By

EDWARD FOSKETT, F.R.S.L., ETC.

COVENTRY

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[THREEPENCE]

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LIBRARY.

NOTE.

AN article by Mr. H. Keatley Moore, in favour of "Open Access in Public Lending Libraries," having appeared in *THE LIBRARY* for December, 1899, the Editor wrote asking me to furnish him with an article "*giving the other side of the Open Access question.*" He was good enough to say that he "did not know anyone who could deal with it better"; and he offered "to pay on our highest scale." He made no condition whatever; but he suggested that the contribution should occupy less than half the space given to the opener.

I consented to write the article, and it was promptly sent. It will be noticed that I have followed Mr. Moore, point by point, dealing only with the libraries he particularized. This did not fall in with the Editor's purpose, and he subsequently endeavoured to bar me from referring to the "specific libraries" from which Mr. Moore drew his conclusions. As, however, I was asked to give "the other side of the Open Access question," it would not have been "the other side" if I had left his assertions unanswered. The Editor finally declined to print the MS. unless I consented to give him a free hand to "edit the article very thoroughly"; but I refused to permit excisions to suit the views of open access promoters.

It is unnecessary to question or comment on the Editor's "impartiality." Readers can form their own opinion; but it is a strange controversy, in which one side is to dictate their opponent's reply. The Editor of *THE LIBRARY* has never disguised the direction of his predilection. The article he invited, and then refused to print, now speaks for itself; and it may explain *why* it was not acceptable to him and his coadjutors.

E. F.

CAMBERWELL, LONDON,

February, 1900.

Open Access in Public Libraries.



HE end may serve as a beginning. The concluding words of the paper under notice should be read, re-read, and remembered as a *résumé* of the spirit which has invariably animated the propagandists of open access.* Mr. H. Keatley Moore furnishes conspicuous evidence of characteristic ability as a newly-recruited advocate. His utterance flows as an inspiration. He modestly claims to write "from a reader's point of view"; but he must be credited with a combination of remarkable qualities. He goes freely into technical details within the purview of a librarian; and he also discloses his authority as a member of the library committee at Croydon. Under these circumstances the face of open access is photographed without spot or wrinkle. It is even touched up to its idealistic best; and, if rhetorical assertion compensated for the omission of common-place facts, the word-picture, as a plausible figment, might pass unnoticed. It often happens that the ability of an advocate mirrors the weak-

A Remarkable
Advocate.

* "Open access will be a thorn in the flesh of the lazy librarian. His clumsy catalogue, his higgledy-piggledy piles of heterogeneous volumes, placed on the shelves in the order they are bought, his neglect to procure the latest and best books, will not stand the actual survey of his natural enemy, the genuine reader. His 'hout, hout, hout' will no longer serve to drive away the importunate person. He will have to adopt a real classification, whether Dewey's or some other. He will be perpetually asked to prove that a volume is in or out by these pestilent bores who really want it and cannot find it on the shelves. No turning of a packet red-side out and blue-side in will suffice. He will be plagued and pestered, his pet sins will be found out, his slumbers disturbed, his deficiencies exposed; and indeed, if he cannot contrive to stifle open access and its results, he will have to . . . go!"—*The Library*, p. 62.

ness of his cause. If an impartial statement had been made no reply would have been necessary, for the facts of open access would have refuted and condemned its fallacious theories. But Mr. Moore's presentment is essentially and unequivocally one-sided. His details, marshalled with boldness, are often as vague as they are unimportant; and one regrets the absence of some details which would have given a little shade-relief to the glamour of his romance.

**Refuge for
Incapacity.**

The Clerkenwell and Croydon libraries are particularly referred to. If the deplorable picture Mr. Moore has drawn was based on experience at either of those libraries, prior to the advent of open access, it would be impossible to refute him. They were under my observation; and at that time Croydon might well have been dedicated to Chaos, while weary Clerkenwell suffered from too "many inventions." In both instances any alteration could scarcely have proved for the worse; and readers, long worried by frequent changes and ineptitude, were naturally glad to be told to help themselves. This, however, does not warrant the attitude of superiority assumed by the promoters of a resuscitated free-and-easy refuge for incapacity; nor is it any reason why more than ninety per cent. of public libraries all over the kingdom should alter successful methods of administration. Having witnessed the pathetic failure to provide satisfactorily for readers at Croydon, Mr. Moore appears to have pioneered the committee to open access as a goal for heroic despair. Knowing what had been, and, perhaps, foreseeing what might be, he may have displayed perspicacity.

**Rectifying
the Blunder.**

He says the "Bishopsgate Institute and Clerkenwell" were their "happy hunting-grounds for some time"; and that "the result was victory all along the line." This is interesting; but the romance is a little blurred, for it should be known that the Bishopsgate Institute has recently taken the first step to rectify the initial mistake into which it was led by self-advertised "experts." A new librarian, with sterling loyalty to the existing arrangement, did much to prevent loss and modify disadvantages; but the library

authority, with due regard to the claims of readers, seem determined to be rid of a pernicious delusion, and to substitute the best facilities of access to books as at the most efficiently administered libraries in the kingdom. The same thing has been done at other places, while some libraries have to make the best of a bad bargain for lack of funds.

Let us suppose the self-sacrificing mentor, "from a reader's point of view," had had the temerity to try to get his quotation verified at the shrine at Clerkenwell. There, instead of an open reference-door, he would have found a cold exclusiveness, and a bar to prevent him going to the reference books. It is the reader, and not a messenger, who goes to the reference library. There the freest access should be given, consistent with the size and character of the volumes wanted. Verily the loudest preachers most often belie their sermons; and at Clerkenwell the books, which might range round the room, with sitters in the centre, are kept sternly out of reach and view. There is no sign or semblance of liberty. It would, indeed, be hard to find a more gaol-like, detective-looking repository than this prison-barred travesty of freedom.

A Travesty of Freedom.

The foregoing is not one of Mr. Moore's "bogeys." The seven which come at his bidding are supposed to represent the complete phalanx of opposition. He raises and he lays them with the ease of an expert who combines in his own person the dual functions of "spirit" and "medium." In all such shows it is only necessary to have faith and believe; but a determination to strike a light, or apply tests, destroys harmony and the medium's reputation, except within the fraternity where all things are explainable.

One or two of the "bogeys" have rather strong physiques. There is the first, labelled: "People will steal the books wholesale"; and it is claimed to be annihilated or laid with the bald negation that "people *don't* steal the books." Then follows the strange qualification—"WE LOSE LITTLE MORE THAN BEFORE." Now a *tu quoque* would not be convincing; and, as Mr. Moore glorifies the platitude that "an ounce of

Thefts and Losses.

fact outweighs a ton of theory," I present him with the following small-weight illustration :—

**Conviction
versus
Assertion.**

A man who lived close to the Clerkenwell Library was convicted at the Old Bailey, and sentenced to three years' penal servitude, for stealing about 200 books from the two or three open access libraries in London. I saw several volumes, with stamp impressions imperfectly obliterated, which evidently belonged to Clerkenwell. I, therefore, suggested that the detective should call at the library. He did so, but unfortunately failed to obtain information or list of losses. "Behold!" shouts the new crier, "the loss per annum at Clerkenwell is one-and-six"; and at Croydon, whether more or less, "it is little more than before." How unctuously comforting this is! "Prodigious!"—let the Old Bailey, and other convictions, stand with these assertions for what they are worth. Yet it should be remembered that the Clerkenwell Library was compelled to admit the theft of valuable curios, which had been lent; and it was not until the book-thief was caught at another kind of library that the bubble of no losses at open access libraries was proved to be—well, not an ounce of truth, but much nearer a ton of something very different.

**Sundry
"Bogey's."**

Brief comments on other of the seven sprites must suffice. We are told "There is not much misplacement on the shelves." The difficulty of the inexperienced, in replacing books where they should go, is indisputable. The vague assertion, affecting the irresponsible public, is contrary to my personal observation in open access libraries. On one occasion I noted five persons who misplaced eleven volumes, seven of which were put on wrong shelves. To the rather substantial contention that "constant handling of books will prematurely wear them out," we get the elegantly unanswerable dictum that it is "*a sheer hollow turnip of a bogey*." This is a good specimen of academic argument from an open access environment. Those experienced in the handling of books know the importance of how, and how not, to do it. We sometimes speak thoughtlessly of the "life" of

**Handling of
Books.**

books. Yet most librarians cannot look upon them as mere chattels of commerce; but, with an Assisi-like interest in their existence, feel that useless wear and reckless tear are as insults and wrong-doing to friends who deserve affectionate greeting. "Hollow turnip" missiles cannot alter the fact that extra handling entails extra wear; and that the kind of handling is a potent factor in producing effects which cannot be gauged, measured, or tabulated.

Further, we are assured that "borrowers do not block the shelves," and "rarely remain long at them." The latter statement I, in the main, confirm; and add, from positive knowledge, that many would not go to the shelves if other opportunities of getting books were afforded them. A large number of volumes can be, and are, ruthlessly handled in a comparatively short time. The book-stacks tower above the heads of seekers, and the volumes range from above to within a foot from the floor. If the appreciation of open access were evidenced by a considerable number of discriminating or interested seekers, to that extent the popular books would be blocked by the drapery and stature of each person covering the shelves. The nuisance and inconvenience prevail, and modification only comes as the pseudo-privilege is practically repudiated by those for whom it was nominally set up. But the disadvantage of going direct to the shelves is realized by many as on a par with the loss in time and selection which would accrue by going to a draper's shop where the assistants looked on while the customers, wanting varied shades, qualities, and sizes, searched the ribbon and glove boxes for themselves. Some idle time-killers might tolerate it, shoplifters would like it, and a few monomaniacs might browse in inane contentment; but it would not pay as a boon for the greatest number. From a reader's point of view, it is the librarian's, "I don't-know-help-yourself-and-don't-bother-me" system.

**Borrowers at
the Shelves.**

**Where Assis-
tants look on.**

The librarian, with his catalogue and other literary aids, is not wanted in open access; his avocation could be better

**Bookbinders
as Educators.**

performed by a detective. It is bibliopeggy which is important—it is the bookbinder who is the real educator. His literary achievements in types and titles are all-sufficient. "How easy," we are told, "it then becomes to select a suitable book." The gradual wearing out of the lettering to an almost invisible dimness, the idiosyncrasies of the classification ("Dewey's or some other") the long-sighted, short-sighted, weak-sighted seekers—all these "trifles light as air" are to Mr. Moore confirmation of the inspiring vista which such chaos gives to borrowers who "seldom stay long at the shelves"; but who yet get an illuminative insight into the sciences, philosophies and all the 'ologies by the vision of pigskin and publishers' cases.

**Rectifying
Misplace-
ments.**

It would be waste of time to analyse Mr. Moore's painfully-laboured effort to minimise the great extra space in widening the shelf-ways, and lowering the shelves, to admit the public direct to them. The result of all the labour is an abortion; but the hobgoblin can be strangled with a tape measure wherever it may raise its head. When we are informed that "there is scarcely any time lost in rectifying misplacements," no test of accuracy can be applied. Its vague value must pass for what it seems worth; as also the astounding declaration that at Croydon the expenditure of time on tidying and dusting the shelves "varies from fifteen to thirty minutes daily." The measurement-run of the shelves is considerable; so there must surely be some occult influence where open access prevails, and unseen hands, perchance, deftly dissipate dust and wave the muddled volumes into serried order. It is possibly correct that open access gives the staff less to do—a doubtful advantage; but I fail to see the economical gain, having yet to become acquainted with an open access library that is worked with fewer assistants than other libraries issuing an equal number of books. If the Clerkenwell Mecca is intended as a test, then libraries could be cited where more books are issued at little more than half the total cost.

A few unconsidered trifles, more earthy than some of the bogeys, may give a passing nod like poor despised relations.

Mr. Moore does not seem to know them. He accommodatingly blows hot and cold. In one breath open access reduces the staff: there is less work, borrowers doing what assistants once did. Then these conditions become transformed into scathing stings—as “thorns in the flesh” of the host of lazy librarians who are outside the little clique-fold. Did Shakespeare prophetically know Mr. Moore when he wrote: “An equivocator, that could swear in both scales against either scale”? To me he is an attractive necromancer whom I yearn to know, confident that he is even better (at his best) than his performance indicates. Think of his graphic picture of “wet,” “overheated,” “clammy,” “steaming,” “damp-crowd” indicator days; and then of the wave of his open access wand to a transformation of warmth and unsullied sunshine. Being susceptible to such conditions, and having a confiding temperament, I almost found myself in the millennium of this fabled epoch. Alas, I happened to remember being at Croydon not long after its delusive dawn! There was an aromatic odour in the atmosphere. The cynical friend who accompanied me sniffed ominously, and said: “*This is a sick house!*” In one sense it was, and is; but the human machine wonderfully adapts itself to chronic ailments. The unkind remark, however, was due to the dropping of a medicine bottle in one of the shelf-ways. The library, though handsomely housed in the municipal buildings, could not keep out the damp that reigned outside. Umbrellas, coats and skirts, “wet” and “clammy,” came in, and some of these went through the narrow gate and anointed a goodly number of volumes before they passed out. The wiser borrowers scrambled for books at the entry rather than avail themselves of the boon of going to the shelves. This practice seems to be now officially discouraged; but it is not prohibited, although checked by not leaving the books so often within reach.

Dust, moisture, and mud! These are not usually regarded as desirable accessions to the welfare of books. If 500 people visit the shelves on damp, muddy days, would

**Equivocator
or Necro-
mancer?**

**The “Sick
House.”**

**The New Dust-
destructor.**

nothing detrimental be left behind? Would the serious dust problem be solved by the aggregated contribution of 500 pairs of muddy boots? Yes! for, under the necromancy of open access, moisture and mud make a dust-destroyer, or Mr. Moore would otherwise have told us. This, perhaps, explains the marvellous time-record in tidying and dusting the shelves.

**Rights and
Needs of
Readers.**

As the major portion of borrowers send messengers for their books, plausibly-sounding access to shelves cannot benefit those who know what they want and send for it; or who prefer to turn over the pages of a not always "clumsy catalogue," and note their requirements. Although we are told that it is in the "non-fictional departments" that open access is "all-important," it is yet a fact that, but for the delusive hope of unsatisfied novel readers, the idea would have been scouted from the first. It appears, then, that with more than a moiety of readers who send for their books, and the fiction-readers whom Mr. Moore depreciates in this connection, there can be but a very small number for whom it could be claimed that open access is "all-important." Of the persons included in the latter number the majority would know the books they desired, and should also be entitled to learn, without delay, whether the book wanted is available at the moment or not. To compel such persons to search for what may be out, lost, stolen, or only misplaced, is a manifest disadvantage and waste of time. To force such borrowers into the vagaries of an open access classifier, by tag and bobtail spots of different shapes and colours, is as ludicrous as Mr. Moore's assurance that "a guilty reader will be haunted by the ghost of that blue triangle which he knows he wilfully left among the scarlet diamonds to save himself a moment's trouble!" This is how, forsooth, with such puerilities of faddists, open access "enlarges and regularizes the boundaries of knowledge."

**The "Guilty
Reader."**

**The "Igno-
rant Reader."**

Ah! but there is that boy who wants "somethin' interestin', mister"; and the forlorn sheet-anchor-of-a-reader, who does not know what he wants. Alas, these hawthers of

open access are but broken reeds! I met the prototype of the "poor lad" at Clerkenwell, and this is how he used open access, and how it served him. My notes were made and confirmed at the time. He climbed up the shelves, and in many odd positions handled books of all sorts and sizes up to a total of nineteen volumes. I have no note of his misplacements; but he was twenty-seven minutes at the shelves, and finally, in apparent bewilderment, he took a technical book on art in mistake for "somethin' interestin', mister," in the travel or tiger-hunting line. I found this out as he was leaving, and he said he should "bring the book back ter-morrer." He would then, I suppose, like Mr. Moore's other "boy at a bazaar," again speculate "with the branpie" of open access, "and be fobbed off with a twopenny rag-doll," or a book he did not want, but which would help to swell the statistics of this boon to readers. Now what that boy wanted was a little personal guidance and help. Such ignorant, yet deserving aspirants are increasingly getting aid in the most efficiently served libraries, and it is in this direction that development is eminently desirable.

There are many libraries using an indicator, as a mechanical convenience for showing at a glance books "in" and "out," where every conceivable requirement of the ignorant, the student and the general reader is thoughtfully provided. What is claimed as "the all-important" in open access is better met in other methods without the innumerable disadvantages of the former. For instance, a reader, not knowing precisely what he wants, has only to give a hint, and all the likely books (except fiction) are actually brought to a table for him, where he can leisurely examine and choose the book for his home-reading. *This is access at its best*; a healthy, elevating liberty compared with the licence of promiscuous wanderers, who wear out books more by careless handling than by reading. In many well-ordered libraries, not only is the fiction reader provided with a concise key-list in alphabetical and numerical sequence; but class-lists on other subjects are similarly focussed for quick reference. These

Access at its
Best.

The "Vestibule of Freedom."

aids, with even a moderately good catalogue, bring the books to the mind's eye under subject, cognate-subject, and author headings ; whereas the volume itself, with indistinct lettering, can only be in one place—hidden, in open access enigmas, where, according to Mr. Moore, there is "a green spot on a 'red' shelf, or a circle among triangles." To get into this earthly paradise there is not exactly an open door. Mr. Moore thus describes how you get in. "The borrower enters the library, only to find himself pinned between the staff-enclosure and the wall, so that necessarily he falls into single file." This, then, is the accurate, authoritative description of the vestibule of freedom. Instead of literary aids and facilities for examining groups of books, without searching for them in vain, we are asked to take a spurious freedom with its concomitant tendencies to the degradation of what should elevate in a library.

Inflated Statistics.

When the statistics of a particular library are paraded misconceptions must arise unless comparisons are scrupulously analyzed and tabulated. It is very seldom that figures can be compared which are drawn from a common or equivalent basis, hence most librarians deprecate the publication of "comparative library statistics." In so prominently proclaiming Croydon figures I desire to credit Mr. Moore with no motive other than the natural pleasure of recording local news. In refraining from setting up rival statistics I venture to assure him that many groups of libraries, less favourably circumstanced, could proclaim better results under other methods. It should be known, moreover, that at Croydon and Clerkenwell statistics are inflated by permitting individual members of families each to have a book of fiction in addition to books in any other class of literature. Elsewhere special music-tickets are sometimes permitted ; but the wider permission, whether desirable or not, could not be given in public libraries where adequate funds are wanting to meet existing demands. Notwithstanding these abnormal efforts at figure-juggling, libraries which pursue another policy can stand the scrutiny

of scientific comparison. I can quite understand that Mr. Moore may not have been informed on the point named. He has also another misconception, which will be apparent to every librarian who has organized new libraries. I refer to the error that, because the central library was opened under the new auspices, and the "old-fashioned" branches declined, that this was due to the changed method. Such transitions of patronage always follow in the wake of newly-stocked, and, perhaps, better-furnished libraries. Identical results prevail elsewhere, without change of method; and it is only after new books have worn down to a common level that the equilibrium of borrowers becomes steady.

**A Miscon-
ception.**

The discursive character of Mr. Moore's eulogium and indictment has necessarily shaped the tenor of this reply. The comments have been restricted to the libraries he particularized, with brief incidental references to different systems. The objections that have been raised to open access may not be, separately, vital; but as a whole they cut at the very root of it, because what is claimed as "all important" is better provided for by other methods. The losses, bad as they are, might be justified if there were compensations in other directions. It has been said that libraries which have tried and discarded open access, like Chester, Penge, Blackburn, etc., did not adopt safeguards. That is not correct; and it comes with bad grace from those who put on their first banner, "Trust the people!" This has been painted out and "safeguarded access" emblazoned thereon; while we are assured that vigilant-eyed attendants watch every person at the shelves. Though losses may thus be reduced, it is analogous to the diminution of thefts which would be secured if every pickpocket in London was shadowed by a detective. This, then, is the sort of surveillance, called "liberty," which respectable borrowers have to endure to keep open access going.

**Detective
Methods.**

Librarians welcome free and fair discussion on all methods of access to books. They desire the fullest deliberation on the technique of every department of their work; but they

**Esprit de
Corps.**

despise the action of those who take an administrative question outside the professional circle where alone its pros and cons can be submitted and discussed. Librarians, with few exceptions, have the charity and modesty to believe that the best they have accomplished may not be the best for others; but that, in the fraternal interchange of views, each may learn and evolve something approaching the best that can be done for his readers. This is the inspiration of genuine librarianship. It is, therefore, pitiable that the promoters of a particular fad should have stifled a much-prized *esprit de corps*, and that they should have relied on influencing the ignorant and uninitiated by the specious catchword of a name.

Persistent
Insults.

Mr. Moore, who has probably been misled in many things, could readily assure himself that two or three whipper-snappers might learn and unlearn much from librarians who are not everlastingly crying their own wares and virtues. I regret that (inadvertently, I hope) he should have echoed, in his defamatory conclusion, their persistent insults to every librarian in the kingdom who takes a logical objection to *one* out of many methods—an objection based on the vital interests of readers and the books librarians love better than self-advertisement. There is no pleasure in writing of the tactics referred to. The only satisfaction is that I may have expressed, in some feeble measure, the unwritten protest of known and unknown *confrères* in the brotherhood of books.

EDWARD FOSKETT.

* * * *The Author will be pleased to receive communications on the subject of this article.*

APPENDIX.

OPEN ACCESS FROM A CLERKENWELL READER'S POINT OF VIEW.

Since writing the preceding article I have had an illuminative letter placed in my hands. I am totally unacquainted with the writer. The gentleman to whom the epistle was sent, being interested in public libraries, showed it to me, and I have been favoured with permission to print it. The following is an exact transcript of the letter; the original, giving full name and address, is open to Mr. Keatley Moore's inspection.

Myddleton Street,
Clerkenwell, E.C.,
February 10, 1900.

DEAR GEORGE,

You have asked my opinion of "Free-access" system. As far as I have tried it, it is a dismal failure. Contrast the two systems. "Non-access," I go to the Library, see by the Indicator whether the book I want is in or not, if not I select another. I write particulars on a slip, hand it to the attendant, and the book is handed to me. With the other system I present myself at the counter; the attendant, after perusing my credentials, unbolts the gate and I pass into the sacred precincts. I take up a catalogue, find what shelf my book is on (or supposed to be) and then when I look for it nine times out of ten it is not there. After many inquiries of attendants I am told "it must be out." Again, perhaps the book I want should be located on a top shelf. That means a hunt for a step-ladder, only to find another weary searcher has got it. Having (if lucky) found the book on the said top shelf, I see it is, perhaps, covered with dust, which means looking round for a duster. Now in the "Non-access" system the book would have been handed to me clean.

"Free-access" is a failure. You cannot find a book when you want it—it is either out or, owing to attendants carelessness, it is not in its right place. "Free-access" is all noise, bustle, searching after books, needless delay, etc. The other system is quietness, speed, comfort, etc. Another cause of confusion is that borrowers wandering about, pick up a book, don't like it, put it back anywhere. I cannot see how "Free-access" can be conducted properly unless there is a great increase in the work of the attendants to put the shelves right. "Free-access" is in vogue at the local Library of the above parish. After a few trials I gave it up in disgust (as I believe others have done) and have ceased to use the Library.

Yours truly,
E — T — S —

[P.S.]—My business being in Southwark, I find it much more convenient and better to use the Library there, where the Indicator is in use.

[P.T.O.]

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Even those whose predilections lead them almost exclusively to prose-fiction are likely to find this narrative poem interesting. It combines the features attractive in a novel with those which are essentially poetic. Readers will probably wonder how much of the story is based on fact, or whether the whole is imaginary. The Author gives no hint, and he gave none in his "Window in the Rock," which created a shrine near Boscastle to which tourist-pilgrims are now directed by a finger post. There is more action in "Hugh Trebarwith," and there is something in the hero's name, for the scene is Trebarwith Strand, near Tintagel. The three leading characters are distinctively portrayed, and the narrative embodies passion and pathos with a tragical denouement. It may be worth noting that in the hands of a good reader or elocutionist the poem would furnish a really effective evening's recital.

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By FREDERICK LITCHFIELD, *Author of "Pottery and Porcelain," etc.*

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